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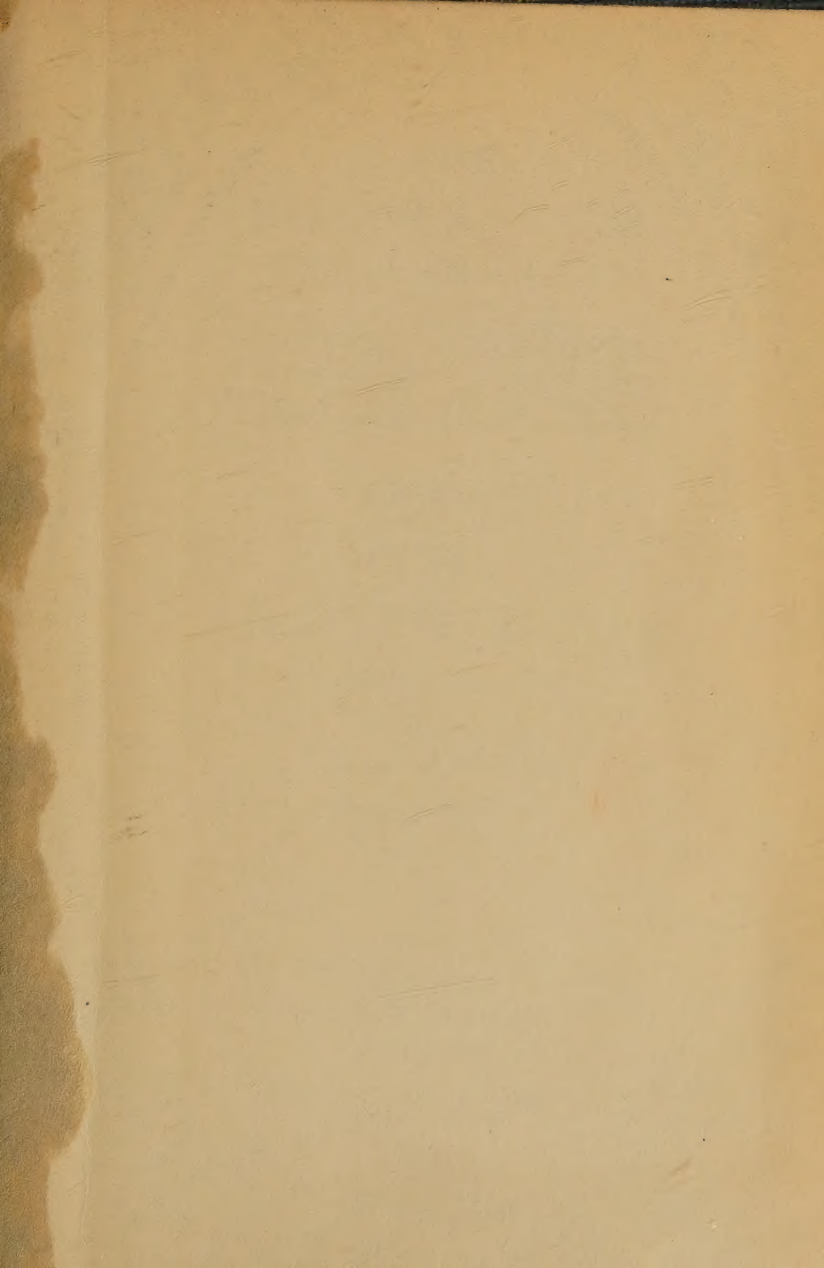
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REA

**ACPL ITEM
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ALVAREZ

SEP 28 1940



THE
ELEONORA DUSE
SERIES OF PLAYS

DIRECTION OF MORRIS GEST

Edited by OLIVER M. SAYLER

VOLUME IV

THE
CLOSED DOOR

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY
MARCO PRAGA

English translation by
A. S. MACDONALD

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INTRODUCTION

FOR the fourth play in her repertory for her American farewell under Morris Gest's direction, Signora Duse turns back from Ibsen and the north to Italy. To Italy—the Italy of the realist indisputably influenced by Ibsen and by the French Hervieu, pupil likewise of Ibsen. To Marco Praga, in short, and his drama in three acts, "The Closed Door" (*"La Porta Chiusa"*).

For all his fecundity and for all his prominence on the modern Italian stage, Praga is a closed book to us on this side of the Atlantic. "The Closed Door" in this first translation into English is, therefore, an open door between Praga and the American public. That public, if it wishes to know more about the other plays by the same dramatist and about the development of Praga from his earliest play to this, his seventeenth, may find profit in reference to pages 85 to 93 in Dr. Lander MacClintock's "The Contemporary Drama of Italy." It must suffice to note here that Praga, like Gallarati-Scotti, author of "Thy Will Be Done," is Milanese, son of a literary father and now in his sixty-second year, that he has been writing plays since 1887, that "The Virgins" and "The Ideal Wife" are accounted perhaps his best works, and that, as in "The Closed Door," his theme is usually deeply involved in, or skirting the edge of, sexual problems and crises.

"The Closed Door" is probably not Praga's best work; assuredly it is not a great drama for all time. Its anti-climactic last act leans heavily on the poignant peak of the

story when mother, father and son face the future after the revelation of their relationship. That moment, however, is so moving, so pitifully human, so lacking in the cynicism which mars many of his plays, that it excuses many faults. And in the hands of Duse, the entire narrative is ennobled, just as masters of the art of acting from Garrick down to Irving have turned into gold even the works of contemporaries far inferior to Praga.

Whether the choice was made deliberately or not, "The Closed Door" is the third of Duse's plays to stress and make a leading motive out of motherhood. The mothers of "Thy Will Be Done," "Ghosts" and "The Closed Door" would scarcely recognize each other as belonging to the same category: the humble, penitent beggar creeping up the Mount of Calvary on hands and knees, fearful to recognize the son who had repaid her vigil and vow in infant illness by drifting worlds away from her; the intellectually alert but equally helpless Mrs. Alving, brooding, with something far from penitence, on the social code to which she attributes the loss of her son: the sentient Bianca Querceta, struggling within herself to keep the secret of her son's parentage, to hold him near her and still to provide for his peace of mind. That Duse is able to encompass this range and to differentiate these three mothers as authentic individualities while instilling into each of them the secret springs of universal motherhood, is proof of the depth and profundity not only of her art but of her passionately human understanding.

THE EDITOR

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

BIANCA.

MARIOLINA.

IPPOLITO QUERCETA.

GIULIO QUERCETA.

DECIO PICCARDI.

DON LUDOVICO.

MAURILIO.

CHRISTINA.

*The action takes place in the villa of Ippolito Querceta,
near Varese, Italy, at the present time.*

ACT ONE.

ACT ONE.

SCENE: *The salon of the Querceta villa. It is a large room, simply but beautifully furnished. It opens, by semi-circular doors at the back, upon a garden. Left, is a large fireplace; right, an arched doorway, leading into the billiard room. A section of the billiard room, part of the table, and the cue-rack, are visible to the audience.*

Doors lead from the billiard room to other apartments. In the center of the salon, a large table. Near this, a luxurious divan. On the table, a lamp, vases of flowers, books, magazines. Chairs, cabinets, etc. On the walls most beautiful colored engravings. It is evening in September. All lamps are lighted. Moonlight floods the garden outside.

The curtain rising discovers Bianca reading. Mariolina is playing. There is a grand piano at the right. Giulio bends over his cousin, listening to the music. Decio stands in the archway between the two rooms, his back to the audience, watching the players in the billiard room. Ippolito and Don Ludovico are having an exciting billiard game.

Don Ludovico is a priest and wears clerical costume. The other three men are in dinner jackets. Bianca wears a beautiful evening gown; Mariolina, a simple one.

When the curtain rises all are silent. The only sound is Mariolina's soft music.

[Enter Maurilio, from the rear door of the billiard room. He is a gray-haired servant of fifty, in livery. He carries a tray with siphons, ice, syrups, cordials, etc. He places it on a card table in the salon, and then goes out by the same door he entered. A short pause. Mariolina stops playing.]

MARIOLINA. Is this the waltz you mean?

GIULIO. No, Mariolina. The one I like is much slower. I don't know its name.

MARIOLINA. But many of the Schumann waltzes have no name. I think this is one of the loveliest. Don't you like it?

GIULIO. Yes. But I think the other more beautiful. You certainly must know it.

MARIOLINA. But I don't remember it. How aggravating!

GIULIO. When I go to Milan tomorrow, I will buy the whole set of Schumann's waltzes for you.

[Bianca, a little startled by Giulio's words, stops reading, and half closes her book. After a slight pause, and with-

out turning round, she asks, as if just for the sake of asking.]

BIANCA. You are going to Milan tomorrow, Giulio?

GIULIO. Yes, mother. Can I do anything for you there?

BIANCA. No, Giulio, thank you. [*She opens her book, but can no longer fix her attention upon it.*]

GIULIO [*to Mariolina*] I will send you the music, and you must find the piece. [*Going to the small table, he mixes a drink for himself.*]

MARIOLINA. Without your help? [*She rises and goes to him*] Are you not coming back tomorrow?

GIULIO. No, Mariolina.

MARIOLINA. How shall I find the waltz without you? I don't know it.

GIULIO. I am sure you will recognize it.

MARIOLINA. I shall have to guess.

GIULIO. If you succeed, I'll give you a present when I come back.

MARIOLINA. What?

GIULIO. I'll think about it.

MARIOLINA. When *I* give a present, I know what I wish to give.

GIULIO. I do not. . . . Lack of imagination.

MARIOLINA. No — lack of heart.

GIULIO. Oh — Oh!

MARIOLINA. Well, — lack of sentiment.

GIULIO. What terrific words!

MARIOLINA. In a really kind heart, the wish to give and the gift itself are one and the same thought.

GIULIO [*takes her little nose in his fingers*] Signorina, you stand at the head of your class.

DECIO [*without turning round*] A fluke, Ippolito.

MARIOLINA [*going to Decio, stands beside him, watching the billiard game*] Giulio is becoming unbearable.

DECIO. And you just won't stand it, will you, Mariolina? [*He puts his arm around her waist, paternally affectionate.*]

GIULIO. Mother, shall I mix you a drink?

BIANCA. Is there any iced coffee?

GIULIO. Yes. Will you have some?

BIANCA. Thank you, — half a glass.

GIULIO [*preparing the beverage*] It will keep you awake. I don't know why you *will* drink coffee at night, and then complain of insomnia.

DECIO [*à propos of the billiard game*] Splendid, Don Ludovico. You will make a first-class billiard player.

DON LUDOVICO [*laughing*] Do you think so?

DECIO. A run of twelve. [*Counting the balls that Don*

Ludovico is making] Thirteen. Fourteen. Ah, thirteen was a fatal number for you.

DON LUDOVICO [*making his points*] And yet they say it is a lucky number. [*He goes and stands in front of Decio and Mariolina, his cue in his hand, while Ippolito takes his turn playing.*]

MARIOLINA. You very nearly beat the expert.

DON LUDOVICO. Making fun of me, are you? Look out; the next time you come to confession, I won't give you absolution.

MARIOLINA. Oh, well, I'll go to Don Luigi.

IPPOLITO [*misses his shot. Don Ludovico goes back to play*] Oh, I am out of practice.

MARIOLINA. I told you that Don Ludovico would win.

IPPOLITO. He will have to give me a handicap soon.

[*The game goes on.*]

BIANCA [*in a low tone*] Giulio, what are you going to do at Milan?

GIULIO. Nothing much. Go to the tailor's. Buy a saddle for my new horse. An errand for grandmother.

BIANCA. Can't you do all this and come back for dinner?

GIULIO. No, mother.

BIANCA. You will come back on Saturday, then?

GIULIO. Saturday or Sunday.

BIANCO. And yet you told me . . .

GIULIO. What?

BIANCA. That you were going to Milan. . . .

GIULIO [*rising and going to Bianca*] Why, yes. [*Laughs*] I am not going to run away. [*Bends over her caressingly, his cheek against hers*] My own big sister! They say you are my mother. But who would believe it? This young, beautiful mother of mine, so jealous and so afraid, thinks her great boy of twenty still a baby. And she wants to keep him tied to her apron strings.

BIANCA. Now, Giulio. . . .

GIULIO. But he gets bored here in the country, it is so quiet. So he is going to Milan for a few days without asking her permission. Own up, mother. You think I should ask it. Well, I ask it. Now, please, may I go to Milan for a few days? Yes. Thank you. You are the pearl of mothers, and I will bring you back some *marrons glacés*. [*Kisses her. Then goes and sits at the piano, running his fingers lightly over the keyboard, as if trying to remember the Schumann waltz.*]

DECIO [*leaves Mariolina and goes close to billiard table, much interested in the game*] Wonderful, Don Ludovico! The victory is almost yours. Don't let it slip.

[*Don Ludovico takes his turn. Mariolina stands beside Decio.*]

MARIOLINA. Six balls more and Don Ludovico wins.

BIANCA [*to Giulio*] Lucio Galvani Scotti is in Milan, is he not?

GIULIO [*without turning round*] How do you know?

BIANCA. It is in the newspaper.

GIULIO. I have not read it.

BIANCA. Still, you know he is there.

GIULIO. Yes. He wrote to me.

BIANCA. Ah! [*Hesitates a moment, then rises and goes to Giulio. Gently*] You will see him?

GIULIO. Of course.

BIANCA [*anxiously*] Is that why you are going to Milan?

GIULIO [*a little nervously*] For that — and other things.
[*Rises and walks away.*]

BIANCA [*going forward, draws him back. She tries to meet his eyes, but he avoids her gaze*] You are not . . . ?
No, not really? Tell me, Giulio.

GIULIO [*his face darkens; he frees his arm from her hand*] No. [*His voice is dull, spiritless*] Because you do not wish it. Because you have denied me the very first favor I ever asked you. But you have denied it, and so we will not speak of it again.

[*Goes to table, nervously pours out a drink. Bianca, almost in a fever, goes to the piano, rests her elbows on the*

keyboard, and her head in her hands. At this moment, Don Ludovico misses his stroke.]

DON LUDOVICO. I am beaten. But look, Signor Piccardi, by a hair.

DECIO. It is hard to stick at forty-nine. But perhaps Ippolito will miss his six.

MARIOLINA. Yes. Uncle Ippolito is not playing in luck.

IPPOLITO. If I fluke now, I will never touch a cue again. Great, to be whipped by a beginner, wouldn't it? [*He plays on. Giulio goes and stands looking out into the garden, lights a cigarette.*]

BIANCA [*in a low voice, gently*] Giulio!

GIULIO [*nervous, incisive*] Mother, don't speak of this again. I am not a boy any longer. Much more of a man than you believe. But you wish me to remain a boy. Your love tries to keep me one. I want to be a man, and to get away from this stupid, odious life.

BIANCA [*painfully*] Giulio!

GIULIO. Yes, I mean it, — odious, idiotic. But you won't let me go. Very well. I am only twenty, and so I must obey you. I can't go away, so what are you afraid of? You think I mean to see Galvani Scotti in Milan, and join his expedition?

BIANCA. Giulio!

THE CLOSED DOOR

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GIULIO. I gave you my word. So you can set your mind at rest, for the present. We won't mention the subject for another year.

BIANCA. You are terrible.

GIULIO. Not any more than you are to me.

[Goes out into the garden and disappears. Bianca sighs. Then, during the following conversation, she goes back to the chair in which she was seated at the rise of the curtain. She takes up her book and pretends to read.]

MARIOLINA. Victory for Uncle Ippolito.

DON LUDOVICO. Whipped again!

[The players put their cues into the rack and come into the salon, where they join Decio and Mariolina. Ippolito goes to the mantelpiece on which he has left a small ivory pipe, and lights it. The other three come forward into the center of the room.]

DECIO *[to Ludovico]* But you lost splendidly. Ippolito is a billiard player of the first rank. At the club no one ever beats him.

IPPOLITO. Where is Giulio?

BIANCA. He went into the garden.

[Ippolito goes out. He is seen to pass into the garden and then disappear.]

BIANCA *[putting down her book]* Don Ludovico, you have not given me anything to do for a long time. I am

going to see Margherita tomorrow. She is almost well now, and the old bricklayer has gone back to work.

DECIO. The one who hurt his leg?

DON LUDOVICO. Hurt? We thought it would have to be cut off. Donna Bianca saved him.

BIANCA. Oh! Oh! Oh!

DON LUDOVICO. Certainly, — sending a specialist and paying all expenses.

BIANCA. And the Tiraboschi child?

DON LUDOVICO. Out of danger, Donna Bianca.

BIANCA. Do these poor people need anything?

DON LUDOVICO. No. They will have everything they want when the little one is well. He is a dear child.

BIANCA. I must go to the Borchiani tomorrow. They sent for me.

MARIOLINA [*goes over to Bianca, puts her arms about her aunt's neck*] How good you are, aunt!

DON LUDOVICO. She is a saint, — the blessing of the whole countryside.

BIANCA. Oh, please, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. But you are. The months you are here in the country we have far less sorrow and suffering. If you could only be here all the time! Especially in winter. Winter is so hard.

MARIOLINA. But my aunt provides even when she is not here.

DON LUDOVICO. But money is not the only thing. It is her presence, her words, that comfort. And sometimes these do more good than money.

BIANCA [*rises; goes towards Don Ludovico, and takes his hands*] Don't make me blush, Don Ludovico. Perhaps before very long I may be here all the time,—even in winter.

MARIOLINA. Oh, aunt, what are you saying! Decio, did you hear her?

DECIO. Yes, I heard.

MARIOLINA. And you don't say anything?

DECIO. My dear child, what can I say?

MARIOLINA. Aren't you astonished?

DECIO. No, because it is not the first time that I have heard your aunt say it.

MARIOLINA. But it is the first time that I have. I don't believe aunt has ever told grandmother, uncle, or Giulio. Did she say to you, Decio, that she wished to live in the country?

DECIO. I know that Donna Bianca has thought of this for quite a long time.

MARIOLINA. But she spoke of it only to you! So you are my aunt's confidant.

DECIO. No. I am an old and very good friend. And there are little things that one confides more quickly to a friend than to one's family. It is easier.

DON LUDOVICO. Do you really mean it, Donna Bianca?

BIANCA [*laughing*] Oh, not at once. Not next winter, anyhow.

MARIOLINA [*more and more astonished*] You mean to stay here the whole time? Not to go away at all? I'll tell grandmother at once.

BIANCA [*seating herself before the fireplace*] Mariolina, don't say anything to grandmother or to anybody else. Won't you sit down, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. I am standing here like a ramrod, because the news astonished me so much and gave me so much pleasure. [*He sits on the divan.*]

MARIOLINA. It is a secret, then, aunt?

BIANCA. It is not a secret. It is too simple and unimportant. But it is useless to provoke discussion ahead of time.

MARIOLINA. What about Giulio and Uncle Ippolito?

BIANCA. Uncle Ippolito does not need me. He can live in Milan by himself.

MARIOLINA. And Giulio?

BIANCA. I told you it was not a plan to be carried out immediately.

MARIOLINA. When?

BIANCA. I don't know. You are very curious, Mariolina.

MARIOLINA [*going to her; affectionately*] Excuse me, aunt. But your idea seems to me so strange and so sad.

BIANCA. Sad?

MARIOLINA. Yes, — for me. I am alone with grandmother. Father and mother are dead, and without you, I would have a very dull time in Milan. Unless grandmother decides to live here winters, too; and then I'll be in the country all the time. It won't be very amusing.

BIANCA. Oh, no, — what are you saying? Grandmother would not stay here in winter for a kingdom.

MARIOLINA. But, then . . .

DECIO [*playfully, going towards Mariolina*] But, then, if there is no one else to take you to teas or the theatre, or to parties, there will still remain your old friend Decio.

MARIOLINA. An old friend who is much too young.

DECIO. I am almost thirty years older than you. How old are you? Seventeen. Yes, almost thirty years older than you.

DON LUDOVICO. But unfortunately he does not look it; does he, Mariolina?

DECIO. So I would be a compromising escort? [*Gay and laughing*] Well, then, do you know what I will do?

Come here. [*Takes her by the hand*] I'll marry you. What do you say to that? It is better than nothing, isn't it?

MARIOLINA. Just a little.

DECIO. Sincere, if not flattering.

MARIOLINA [*as the telephone rings*] The telephone. That must be grandmother. [*She goes to the telephone in the billiard room. Meanwhile Ippolito and Giulio are seen walking in the garden. They pause on the threshold. Ippolito is talking to his son and smoking his little pipe. He appears to be telling a story, gesticulating and much amused at it. Giulio appears to listen as if annoyed.*]

MARIOLINA [*at telephone*] Yes. You, grandmother? Who is here? No one. Oh, Don Ludovico and Decio, of course. [*Pause*] I don't know. I'll ask. [*Turns to her aunt*] Grandmother wants to know if you can send somebody home with me.

BIANCA. I don't know. Decio, are you going out?

DECIO. No, Donna Bianca. And besides I refuse to escort Mariolina. She does not wish me, either as escort or as fiancé.

BIANCA [*seeing Ippolito*] Ippolito, are you going out?

IPPOLITO. Yes; I am going to Contessa Biccé's for bridge.

BIANCA. Then you can take Mariolina home?

IPPOLITO. Certainly.

MARIOLINA. You don't mind, Uncle?

IPPOLITO. No. And I will drop in a moment to see grandmother. I have not seen her for a week.

MARIOLINA [*back at telephone*] Are you still there, grandmother? Uncle Ippolito will take me home, and come in for a few moments to see you. [*To Ippolito*] She says that will be a great pleasure, and she asks you to bring her that recipe for almond pudding.

IPPOLITO. I forgot it. [*He presses wall button. Don Ludovico rises and goes over to speak to Giulio.*]

MARIOLINA. What did you say? Don Ludovico? Oh, listen, grandmother. I have something to tell you. I would blush to tell you face to face. I have just had a proposal. From whom? Guess. From Decio.

[*Decio threatens her jokingly. Enter Maurilio.*]

IPPOLITO [*to Maurilio*] The automobile.

[*Exit Maurilio.*]

MARIOLINA [*still at telephone*] What shall I say to him? That he must like chains. All right. I will tell him. Good-by.

DECIO. Making fun of me, are you? [*Pulls her nose.*]

MARIOLINA. No, I was not. Take care of my nose.

BIANCA [*going to the rescue*] Leave her alone, Decio. Don't tease her any more.

MARIOLINA [*to Don Ludovico*] Don Ludovico, grandmother asked if you will dine with us tomorrow.

DON LUDOVICO. Today, Donna Bianca. Tomorrow, the Marchesa. My parishioners will say I am turning into a society man.

BIANCA. It would give my mother so much pleasure.

DON LUDOVICO. You are very good. But two days in succession!

MARIOLINA. Well, the day after tomorrow, then?

DON LUDOVICO. Saturday? No, I must go to Milan Saturday.

[*Ippolito reënters with the recipe book; places it on the mantelpiece; turns over the leaves.*]

BIANCA. Going to Milan? Why, that is a miracle.

DON LUDOVICO. A real miracle. I have not set foot there for a year.

BIANCA. And, if I may ask, Don Ludovico, what are you going to do at Milan?

DON LUDOVICO. I am going to say good-by to a young priest, — a friend of mine, who is leaving for a wild and distant country.

IPPOLITO. A missionary? That is a vocation I never could understand. Of course, it is pleasant to travel, if at the end of a journey one finds a grand hotel.

BIANCA. Where is your friend going? To China?

DON LUDOVICO. No. To a new country. No one knows exactly where it is. To Lucesia.

BIANCA. Ah!

[*Giulio struck by the word, leaves the window and approaching Don Ludovico, listens with great attention.*]

DON LUDOVICO. He leaves Tuesday, on an expedition.

GIULIO. The Galvani Scotti expedition?

DON LUDOVICO. Yes. How do you know about it?

GIULIO. Lucio Galvani Scotti is my friend. Last year he discovered, or perhaps I should say explored, for the first time, a region in East Africa. He calls it Lucesia. [*Becoming more and more excited*] He came back to Italy for capital to develop it. A society was founded. The government, too, has given its support. So now he is going back with better equipment, and a large party of men, — engineers, doctors, workmen and soldiers. And so he is taking a priest with him? I did not know that.

DON LUDOVICO. Yes, he wants a priest, too, because in case of illness or death, it is a comfort to have a priest. And, then, my friend wishes to work, if possible, for the conversion of the natives. Scotti applied to the missions, and a young friend of mine, Don Carlo Perelli, who is strong, courageous, intelligent, and cultured, was chosen. Well, I confess I envy him.

DECIO. You, Don Ludovico?

DON LUDOVICO. If I were only twenty years younger. . . .

DECIO. Would you go?

DON LUDOVICO. With the utmost joy.

[Meanwhile Giulio, whose face has darkened, has gone toward the billiard table.]

BIANCA *[anxiously following Giulio with her eyes]* Giulio, are you going out, too?

GIULIO. No, mother. *[Exit, right, through billiard room door.]*

IPPOLITO. Poor boy! Why in the world don't you let him go with Scotti?

[A long embarrassed silence. Bianca, disdainful and sad, rises from her chair and goes toward the window. Mariolina, who understands it is a painful moment, goes to the piano and pretends to be interested in a music album. Decio lights a cigarette, sitting down at left of table. Ippolito, standing beside mantlepiece, cleans his pipe. Don Ludovico remains alone in the center of the room. He looks about, not understanding.]

IPPOLITO. Don Ludovico, you have made a break. *[Laughs.]*

DON LUDOVICO. I am extremely sorry. What did I say?

IPPOLITO. Giulio is heartbroken because he cannot join

the expedition to Lucesia. The boy feels he has the stuff of a pioneer in him. But his mother will not let him go.

DON LUDOVICO. Ah, I did not know. Donna Bianca, I am most sorry.

BIANCA [*standing at the open window, her back to the audience*] For what, Don Ludovico?

IPPOLITO. Giulio has lost his head over Lucesia.

DECIO. To be more exact, Galvani Scotti has made him lose it.

IPPOLITO. I think you are mistaken. Indeed, I know you are mistaken. It was Giulio himself who spoke to his friend, who offered himself. He never imagined that his mother would refuse her consent.

BIANCA. As you, too, should have refused it.

IPPOLITO. I? Why? If he has a desire to do something — different — who knows? A dream of glory, — at twenty!

BIANCA [*turning to her husband*] But the risk, the danger?

IPPOLITO. Relatively little. [*Silence*] Well, good-night, everybody. Are you coming, Mariolina? [*Turns away.*]

BIANCA [*almost violently, takes a step towards him*] Yes, and you put all the pain of refusing him upon me.

IPPOLITO. My dear, you know that I have very little influence over Giulio.

BIANCA. You have never known how to win him.

IPPOLITO. Probably. He is so unlike me. Our son resembles only you. And, after all, I cannot reproach myself with putting this idea into his head, either by example or by word. I never stray farther than Paris. He was probably much more influenced by Decio, who is always traveling.

DECIO [*a little dryly*] Ah, indeed! So it is all my fault!

IPPOLITO. Well, wasn't it you who fostered his taste for travel?

DECIO. Exploration is quite a different thing. Donna Bianca and you entrusted Giulio to me, from time to time. But London and Paris can scarcely give one a desire for Lucesia.

IPPOLITO. London and Paris! You took him to Spain, also, and to Constantinople.

DECIO. But not to mid-Africa, or to the Pole.

BIANCA. Don't argue with him, Decio. Ippolito does not know what he is talking about.

IPPOLITO. Thank you, Bianca. What is the matter? You seem to be on edge tonight.

DON LUDOVICO [*going to Bianca*] Yes, she is a little nervous. I am sorry to have brought up the subject, Donna Bianca.

BIANCA. It was not your fault, Don Ludovico. You must excuse us for discussing it at all.

IPPOLITO. Well, you will hear more of it.

DECIO. I think not. The expedition leaves on the eighteenth. When it has gone, Giulio will forget about it, and be his usual self.

IPPOLITO. You think so? I do not.

BIANCA [*anxiously*] Why?

IPPOLITO. Why? Because I do not think the expedition itself counts especially with Giulio. It is only a pretext. The nearest and most convenient. He has had something on his mind for some time. That is the real root of the trouble. If you don't agree with me, so much the worse for you. I have observed him closely, and have understood him more clearly than you. Perhaps, because I take him much more coolly and calmly.

BIANCA. Mariolina, will you please go and see if the automobile is ready?

MARIOLINA. Yes, aunt. [*She crosses the room and goes out the door in billiard room.*]

BIANCA. Now, Ippolito, just what do you mean?

IPPOLITO. Giulio has something on his mind that troubles him.

BIANCA. What?

IPPOLITO. How do I know?

BIANCA. Why do you think so?

IPPOLITO. I do not think. I observe. Giulio is restless and irritable. Does he seem so to you, Decio?

DECIO. No.

IPPOLITO. Why, he is in a murderous state of mind. No interest in anything. He has given up riding and tennis. He, the champion of Lombardy.

DON LUDOVICO. Perhaps he is in love.

IPPOLITO. No. At his age, love is a matter of light women. You will excuse me for speaking plainly, Don Ludovico. That type of love means endless money, and he has not asked me for a penny. [*To Bianca*] Has he asked you?

BIANCA [*nervous and disturbed*] No.

IPPOLITO. Or you, Decio?

DECIO. Asked me? Are you crazy, Ippolito?

IPPOLITO. Why, that would not be strange. We are all great friends, and he would know you would give him what he wished and say nothing about it.

DECIO. You are absurd.

IPPOLITO. Very well. Find out what is the matter yourself.

BIANCA. No, you should find it out. You are his father.

IPPOLITO. But we get on each other's nerves so easily. You must question him, Bianca. Or, better still, Decio. Of us all, he is most in Giulio's confidence.

DECIO. Again, you exaggerate.

IPPOLITO. Oh, I am not jealous of you. Despite the difference in age, you and Giulio are the best of friends. It is natural to confide in a friend rather than in father or mother. . . . Where are you, Mariolina?

[*Mariolina comes in through billiard room.*]

MARIOLINA. Here I am. The automobile is ready.

[*Ippolito goes out the door in billiard room. Mariolina embraces Bianca.*]

MARIOLINA. I have had a pleasant time. Thank you, aunt. Good-night.

BIANCA [*kisses her*] Good-night, Mariolina. Kiss grandmother for me, and tell her that I shall see her tomorrow.

MARIOLINA. Good-night, Don Ludovico. Oh, tomorrow you dine with us, do you not?

DON LUDOVICO. Really?

BIANCA. Yes, you must go.

DON LUDOVICO. Very well. A thousand thanks to your grandmother. Good-night. [*Kisses Mariolina on the forehead.*]

BIANCA. Aren't you going to wear anything on your head? It is a little chilly.

MARIOLINA. Oh, my scarf. Where is it? [*She looks around and finds it on a chair*] Here it is. Good-night . . . fiancé.

DECIO [*a little nervous and excited, is standing near the fireplace*] Good-night, Mariolina.

[*Ippolito reënters with a cap on his head.*]

IPPOLITO. Excuse me, Don Ludovico, I did not ask if I could put you down at the rectory.

BIANCA. No; let Don Ludovico stay a little while longer.

DON LUDOVICO. Yes, I would rather take a short walk before going to bed. Thank you.

MARIOLINA [*waving her hand gayly*] Good-night. [*She and Ippolito go out.*]

BIANCA [*before the door is closed, — to Decio*] Decio, did you hear what my husband said?

DECIO. What of it? A mere supposition.

BIANCA. Ippolito is not very intelligent, but he is shrewd. He weighs what he says, and sees more clearly than one would suppose. Lucesia only a pretext? Giulio deeply troubled? It does not seem possible that I have been so blind.

DON LUDOVICO. Of course, it is not possible. A mother like you, whose only child adores her.

DECIO. Ippolito was joking. You must not take him seriously, and worry about it. If Giulio is restless, it is easy to find a very natural reason. He is young, intelligent, anxious to distinguish himself. At twenty we are all ambitious. Art and science for some, — sport for others.

[*Changing his tone, laughing a little, but he means it*] Now, if Giulio wanted to fly, you would have something to worry about.

BIANCA. Don't joke.

DECIO. I am quite serious. I think aviation the terror of all mothers. As to Giulio, — he must choose a career, and, Donna Bianca, you have not made it easy for him. Your love holds him back from so much, places so many obstacles in his way. Well, the Galvani Scotti expedition made a profound impression on him. The lure of the unknown has seized his imagination. That is all. Do you not agree with me, Don Ludovico?

DON LUDOVICO. Absolutely, Signor Piccardi.

DECIO. And the new and unknown is more fascinating because of the way you have brought him up. Yours was, in some ways, an excellent method, but you have held him with too tight a rein. You have not allowed him to pursue his studies, because that entailed separation from you. There is an excess of vitality and energy in him that demands an outlet.

BIANCA. You would let him go?

DECIO. With Galvani Scotti? No. But I should try to find a substitute. Meanwhile, I should not torment myself trying to clear up a mystery that does not exist.

BIANCA. Where is he now? [*Goes to the door leading to the garden. Calls*] Giulio.

GIULIO [*in the garden but not very near*] Yes, mother.

BIANCA. Aren't you cold out there?

[*Giulio appears on threshold. He is smoking.*]

GIULIO. Do you want me for anything?

BIANCA. What were you doing?

GIULIO. Nothing. I stepped out into the garden to smoke.

BIANCA. You can smoke here. It is cold out there.

GIULIO. No, it is not at all cold. [*He closes the window*] Mariolina has gone?

BIANCA. Yes; with father.

DON LUDOVICO. And now I must go, too. It is late, Donna Bianca.

BIANCA. Good-night, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO [*shaking her hand*] Good-night. [*In a low tone*] And courage.

DECIO [*shaking hands*] I shall see you Saturday.

DON LUDOVICO. Good-night, signor. Good-night, Giulio.

GIULIO. I will go with you, Don Ludovico. [*He goes with him towards the door at the back. Bianca, restless and disturbed, arranges some flowers in the vases and puts some trifles on the table in order, mechanically.*]

DECIO. I assure you, there is nothing to worry about.

[*Bianca does not answer. A silence. Then Giulio comes in, throws his cap on the chair and flings himself on the divan. Another pause.*]

DECIO [*with forced gayety*] Donna Bianca, would you like a game of *écarté*, or shall we play dummy bridge? What do you say, Giulio?

GIULIO. We would be four dummies then.

DECIO. Thank you. Thank you also for your mother.

GIULIO. I was only joking.

DECIO. But it was not a very pretty joke. Donna Bianca, do you care to play?

BIANCA. No, Decio. I am going to my room very soon. I have letters to write.

GIULIO. Then let us have a game of chess. [*He goes to the table, takes out a box of chessmen and board, and begins to arrange them.*]

BIANCA. Why didn't you go out for awhile, Giulio, — to the club, or to call?

GIULIO. They bore me.

DECIO. Everything bores you.

GIULIO. The same old talk. Such stupid fools!

DECIO [*jokingly*] What a superman you have become in a short time!

GIULIO. Superman? No. Man, perhaps.

DECIO. At twenty!

GIULIO. Twenty for some counts as much as forty for others.

DECIO. Profoundly true.

GIULIO [*nervously; getting out the chessmen*] Don't irritate me, please. Which will you take, the red or the white?

DECIO. The red. [*A short silence, while they are placing their pieces*] Giulio, would you like to go to Aix-les-Bains with me?

GIULIO. No, thank you.

DECIO. Why not?

GIULIO. Because it would not amuse me.

BIANCA. How can you speak in that way, when Decio is so good as to invite you!

GIULIO. Decio is most kind, — kindness personified. But he would take me by the hand, and pick every pebble out of my way. I have had enough of big cities and watering-places.

DECIO. Pummm!

GIULIO. Let me be! Just leave me alone, in God's name!

DECIO. My bishop and my castle. You are lucky.

GIULIO. Yes, I am marvelously lucky.

[*A pause. Then Bianca approaches Giulio and places her hand lightly on his shoulder.*]

BIANCA. Good-night, Giulio. [*Giulio and Decio rise.*]

GIULIO. Good-night, mother. [*Bianca kisses him.*]

BIANCA. Giulio, are you angry with me?

GIULIO [*almost at the end of his self-control*] Why, no, mother. [*Bianca kisses him again. As she turns aside she gives her hand to Decio.*]

BIANCA. Good-night, Decio. [*Decio kisses her hand. His gaze follows her as she slowly goes out through the left entrance. The door is scarcely closed when Giulio has a seizure of almost furious impatience.*]

GIULIO. Damnation! [*As if he had need of physical expression, he pushes the chair on which he has been seated and overturns it. He walks up and down.*]

DECIO. Giulio! [*He goes toward him.*]

GIULIO. Leave me alone. [*Decio grasps him firmly, however, his hand on his shoulder.*]

DECIO. Giulio! What is the matter with you? You are making your mother suffer. And you have always been so good, just like her. There must be some reason for all this. What is it? Won't you tell me? [*Giulio breaks away and goes and leans on the mantelpiece.*]

GIULIO [*almost violently*] I wish to be free! I must go away!

DECIO. You wish to go away?

GIULIO. Yes, and you must convince my mother. You must make her understand.

DECIO. Make her understand? First of all, I myself must understand.

GIULIO [*a moment of uncertainty; then he conquers himself and goes to the divan and sinks down upon it*] You were twenty yourself once. Did you never feel an almost frantic wish to do something—to be someone? [*In a change of tone*] Of course, your circumstances were different from mine, and then the times were different.

DECIO [*looking at him fixedly*] What are you saying?

GIULIO. I say that I must go away. Do something. Be someone,—someone, do you understand? I can't lead this life. I can't be just Signor Querceta. I don't wish to be. I wish to take another name, and to make another life for myself.

DECIO. What are you saying!

GIULIO. I can't live here any longer. That is all there is to it. I can not possibly tell my mother, and my father,—or he who ought to be my father. . . .

DECIO. What are you saying!

GIULIO. I mean it. What kind of father is he? What does he know of me? What has he done for me? A man of his stamp,—to eat, to drink, to dress in London clothes,—to amuse himself, in his own way! That is his life. Yet,

mark you, he is the one who understands me now. He would let me go. Perhaps because I am of no special importance to him. But he does not count in this. He is only Signor Querceta. His wife's husband, and at the same time, a perfect stranger to her.

DECIO. Giulio!

GIULIO. And I am the victim of my mother's unreasoning love. She wishes me to live here with her. To fritter away my time, — like that perfect idiot, her . . .

DECIO. Stop!

GIULIO. No! In two or three years I shall marry Mariolina, and have children; and they will grow up and go on with the same thing.

DECIO. Giulio, are you crazy?

GIULIO. No, I am not crazy. I am telling you the truth. [*He rises to go away, but Decio restrains him.*]

GIULIO [*without looking at Decio*] Let me go to bed.

DECIO. You would not sleep. What strange words you have just spoken, Giulio! What brutal words! And yesterday you were only a boy.

GIULIO. Let me alone.

DECIO. I have noticed the restlessness of your spirit and your sudden change of mood. But, tonight, — now . . . What is the matter? Is it really true? Is the African expedition only a pretext? Is your father right?

GIULIO. My father! — You have said it. [*He breaks away from Decio, with a bitter little laugh*] He is the only one who understands. It is extraordinary. [*He goes to the mantlepiece and turns his back.*]

DECIO. He understands, — what?

GIULIO. No matter.

DECIO. Oh, yes, it does matter. Perhaps I am nothing to you. But you are much to me. I have a great affection for you. I have known you almost from the time you were born. You have grown up under my eyes. I am an old friend, — a very old friend of your family. I taught you to ride and to fence. And then you traveled with me. You have lived with me for months at a time, because your mother trusted me. I am your oldest friend, the devoted and admiring friend of your mother. For her sake, as well as for your own, your happiness is of great moment to me. And you are very unhappy?

GIULIO. Very.

DECIO. And that reacts upon your mother. You are old enough to know that her marriage is far from perfect. There is in it no union of ideas or purposes, — no intimacy. Your father and she are so different. Therefore, your mother, a creature of exquisite sensitiveness, has given her whole heart to you.

GIULIO. Go on.

DECIO. I do not need to praise your mother to you. You know and love her as she deserves. But I feel I should explain my interest in you. You have always been like a young brother to me. If I dared, I should say, like a beloved son. Now you have grown up. If I tried the paternal attitude, you would send me to the devil, wouldn't you? One father is enough. Two, rather a surfeit of a good thing. [*Pauses.*]

GIULIO. Well?

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DECIO. I have already said my say. Your words and attitude of mind disturb me. There must be a reason. Something new in your life, that neither your mother, your father, nor myself know. Won't you tell me? Confide in me, Giulio?

GIULIO. It is nothing new.

DECIO. So there is something? Then your obstinate silence is absurd. It is almost offensive toward me. You treat me as a stranger.

GIULIO. No, — I don't think of you as a stranger, and that is why . . . [*He breaks off.*]

DECIO. What, Giulio?

GIULIO. You know.

DECIO. I?

GIULIO. Yes, you only, — you alone.

DECIO. I only! What do you mean?

GIULIO. The truth! — Father!

DECIO [*as if struck by a bludgeon*] What are you saying!

GIULIO [*with extreme emotion*] You are my father!

DECIO [*a prey to indescribable emotion, is at first undecided as to what to say. Then, as if obeying an imperious duty*] Are you mad?

[*Giulio just gestures: "Be silent; don't deny it, it is useless; I know."* Decio sinks upon the divan. *A long silence. Giulio goes to Decio, puts his hand lightly upon his shoulder. Decio looks up and meets Giulio's loving gaze. He rises, takes his son in his arms. After a minute, Giulio gently disengages himself and withdraws a few paces.*]

DECIO. Giulio!

GIULIO [*in a thread of a voice*] No more. Not now. [*With a gesture, he indicates his mother's room*] She must not know.

DECIO. She could not bear it. We have done so much to keep it from you. We have always had such respect for you, for your home, for ourselves, — for our secret. It was a religion to us. How did you find it out?

GIULIO. Be silent!

DECIO. Who betrayed us?

GIULIO. No one. . . . Please, no more.

DECIO. One thing — did we ourselves reveal it?

GIULIO. No — no! Be silent. My mother may come — may hear.

DECIO. Ah, no! Not your mother! Not one word! It is our secret, — yours and mine. Promise me this.

GIULIO. Yes. It is our secret. [*Pause*] And now you understand why I wish to go away.

DECIO. No.

GIULIO. No? You don't understand? Oh!

DECIO [*decidedly*] Giulio, I must speak to you. Not here. Come into my room.

GIULIO. No! — No!

DECIO. Yes. I must tell you.

GIULIO. Leave me alone. I beg of you! I can't stand any more.

DECIO. Giulio, I beseech you!

GIULIO. You must not tell me anything. I will not listen.

DECIO. Ah, yes!

GIULIO. Not now.

DECIO. At once. I can not leave it now. There are so many things I must tell you — about myself — about you — about her. Everything! For you must pardon us.

GIULIO. What?

DECIO. Oh, I don't know why. I only feel that you ought to pardon. Come! Come!

GIULIO. Not now.

DECIO. I beg you! [*In a thread of a voice*] Giulio! My son! [*Giulio rises, glances rapidly around*] There, — in my room. Your mother . . . I will open this door softly. From the threshold I can see her door, — if there is a light. [*Giulio joins Decio. They look*] Is there a light?

GIULIO. Yes.

DECIO. She is still awake. Don't make any noise. Come!

[*Decio throws his arm round Giulio's shoulder. Together they go into Decio's room.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO.

ACT TWO.

SCENE: *Decio's bedroom in the Querceta villa. At the right is a bed, prepared for the night. At the foot of the bed is a couch. Beside the bed, a night table. The back wall has two doors, one leading into the corridor, the other into a dressing room. At the right is a large window, and a writing table. Easy chairs, etc.*

When the curtain rises, the room is dark, though moonlight streams in from the open window.

Decio and Giulio come in. As he enters, Decio turns on the electric light.

DECIO. Sit down, Giulio.

[Giulio sinks into a chair. Then Decio goes to the window and is about to shut it.]

GIULIO. Leave it open. It is suffocating here.

DECIO *[in a low voice, full of intense emotion]* Giulio, there is much to tell you. You should know everything.

GIULIO *[motionless, without raising his head]* Nothing about her, — about my mother.

DECIO. Yes, Giulio, you ought to know, so that you

may love her even more, — may adore her. [*He puts his hand on Giulio's head. Giulio turns round and looks at him, then away*] Look at me. [*He bends over him*] How are you going to look at me?

[*Giulio rises, puts his arm around Decio's neck. A knock at the door. Decio takes a step toward the entrance, while Giulio slips back into the chair.*]

Who is it?

MAURILIO [*outside*] It is I, Signor Decio.

DECIO. Maurilio? Come in.

[*Maurilio enters. He has a hot water can.*]

MAURILIO. I have brought your hot water.

DECIO. Thank you.

[*Maurilio goes into the dressing room; leaves the hot water can; comes out immediately.*]

MAURILIO. Is there anything else I can do for you, signor?

DECIO. No, thank you.

MAURILIO. And you, Signor Giulio?

GIULIO. Nothing. You may go to bed. You need not stay up on my account.

MAURILIO. I am waiting for Signor Ippolito. He is still out. Good-night, signor.

DECIO. Good-night, Maurilio.

[*Exit Maurilio. Decio goes to window.*]

DECIO. You are right. It is suffocating. [*Then he turns to Giulio.*]

GIULIO. Decio, you must not tell me anything. I must speak to you. *You* have nothing to say to me. What I know is enough. What I do not know does not concern me. I wish to go away. It is necessary for me to go away. If you do not understand this absolute necessity, I do not know what to say to you. You ought to understand and help me. A closed door confronts me. I must open it. Otherwise I stifle, — otherwise I die.

DECIO. Giulio, listen to me.

GIULIO. No!

DECIO. You must not take this the way you do.

GIULIO [*rapidly and excitedly*] I can take it in only one way. I suppose there are many sons who are willing to call their mother's husband father, though he is not. They who can accept this easily are fortunate. But I can not. I can not. Don't you see why? 'You ought to. Your blood is in my veins. Put yourself in my place. What would you do?

DECIO. Oh, Giulio!

GIULIO. What would you do, once your conscience was awakened? When all of a sudden a veil lifted, and you saw the *truth*? Tell me, what would you do? [*Pause*] You don't answer.

DECIO. I shall. Only let me pull myself together. I scarcely know what is in my heart. Whether this is a thing of horror, or whether it is a beautiful liberation. Be patient. But let me tell you one thing, first of all. When you spoke your first words, do you know what I most feared? [*Rising*] That you would think me your mother's lover. Her lover, — only. It was horrible. [*Clasps Giulio's hand*] But you called me father, and I knew you understood. Then, what took place within me! I hardly know myself. What did I say? That you were mad? I should have. I should have denied it, for her — for your mother's sake. Then another terror seized me. Who betrayed us? Was it she? Was it I? But how? One only love in both our lives, — you. One only thought — intense, constant, — that never forgot for one single instant to respect itself, and to respect, for love of you, all that surrounded you, — your home, your name. Your name, because to give you another would mean shame and ruin.

GIULIO [*suddenly*] Who knows?

DECIO. Oh, Giulio, don't say that! Don't say it! [*A short silence*] But we did not betray our secret, — not by an act, a gesture, a word? Tell me.

GIULIO [*nervously*] No. No. No.

DECIO. Then — how? When? . . .

GIULIO [*with evident reluctance*] I do not know. What

does it matter? And why torture me and torture yourself? All this no longer counts. Yesterday and today are so far apart. Rather let us decide about my future—we must decide.

DECIO [*affectionately, winningly*] No, Giulio. I must know everything. It is necessary so that we may defend ourselves, — that we may defend you. Tomorrow we must face your mother. We shall all meet after what has happened between us. Do you wish her to read this in our faces?

GIULIO [*terrified*] No! Not that! It would kill her.

DECIO. You don't wish that, do you? You love her, respect her, now as you always did. Don't you, Giulio?

GIULIO [*sincerely*] As always.

DECIO. Then tell me all. Arm me against the danger that your mother will find out, or guess. Arm me against treachery, and the malice of evil tongues. Who told you? Don't be afraid. Who was it?

GIULIO [*after a moment's hesitation*] No one.

DECIO. Don't lie to me. Someone told. Or was it an anonymous letter?

GIULIO. No. . . . I found it out myself. Your jealous care was useless. Something stronger told me. [*With a bitter smile*] Oh, not the voice of blood. I am the best proof in the world that the voice of blood does not exist.

It was — instinct, perhaps. And, then, if you only think, all this was so absolutely simple.

DECIO. Absolutely simple?

GIULIO. You were always at our house.

DECIO. As your mother's friend, — as her brother.

GIULIO. Yes, — so you seemed to the eyes of a child. But a child does not reason, — it feels. And I felt your affection, your watchful love for me, and I loved you unconsciously, more than — the other, who was kind to me, but without warmth or depth. Then when I grew up, the habit was formed. There was no sense of rebellion. Only at times a vague, indistinct feeling of disquiet. Fleeting sensations that I did not dwell upon, — that I did not wish to dwell upon.

DECIO. And then?

GIULIO. No, — let me go now.

DECIO. I beg you! It is to defend your mother.

GIULIO. Well, if what has happened is an evil, if it may hurt my mother, then the day I was no longer a boy, you should have told me.

DECIO [*sorrowfully*] Giulio!

GIULIO. I am not telling you what you should have done. But I say that secrecy has been to blame for what has happened. Because the time came, — it had to come — when I began to suspect. Your affection for me . . .

your friendship for us, was too unusual. You, young, rich, intelligent, seemed to have nothing in the world, except us. . . .

DECIO. And that is true.

GIULIO. I wondered that you knew no women. You did not seem a man to be content with vulgar loves of a day or an hour. Then what? [*Rises — walks away.*] No! Don't torment me any longer.

DECIO. I am sorry, but you must go on.

GIULIO [*in a low voice, not looking at Decio*] I spied. It was horrible, but it was stronger than myself. Every act, — every gesture of my mother and of you, — I watched. I thought something would betray you. I hid outside doors — behind curtains, — and at night. . . . [*Covers his face with his hands*] Degrading — infamous, but I *had* to find out. [*Almost joyfully*] Nothing! Nothing! You were alone — you and she — and yet there was only her affectionate cordiality toward you, your respectful affection for her. So I was certain there was nothing between you. Ah, how happy I was. You understand? For I knew my mother had no lover. And so I gave myself completely to her love, to your affection.

DECIO [*in a thread of a voice*] And then?

GIULIO. Then — then — I do not know. Then came the other revelation. The veil suddenly lifted, and I knew

the other truth, less painful and more solemn. You were no longer my mother's lover, but you were my father. I understood there was a mystery about me.

DECIO. A mystery?

GIULIO [*going up to him — decidedly*] It does not concern me. I know I am not a Querceta, and that is enough. But I will not accept my legal name. You gave me intelligence and a heart. I can not call myself Piccardi, — so I wish to call myself just anything, and go away.

DECIO [*terrified*] Go away? Where? How?

GIULIO. I do not know. Not forever. But until this crisis is over and the storm within me calmed. A pause in my life, — a time of peace and silence. So, I must have a pretext. Lucesia is the best opportunity. Help me. This is all I ask of you. If you do, you save me. [*Pause — then Decio goes to him.*]

DECIO. You have said there is a mystery.

GIULIO. But I do not wish to know it.

DECIO. There is no mystery, — and you must know.

GIULIO. I refuse to listen.

DECIO. As I had to know about you, so you will have to know about me, — about us. Because you must measure the extent of our fault. . . .

GIULIO. There is no fault. I feel that. Let me keep this feeling. An explanation, — a revelation of the past

will not change, only profane it. No, be silent. I guessed the past myself. Let me keep it as I divined it. Let it be my past, — and say no more about it.

[*Through the open window one hears Bianca's voice calling.*]

BIANCA [*in the garden, not far away, as if she were standing on the threshold of the salon*] Giulio! Giulio!

DECIO. It is she. She is calling you.

BIANCA. Giulio!

[*Decio switches off the lights. The room remains dark. Through the window comes a little ray of moonlight, and a thread of light from the half open door of the dressing room.*]

GIULIO. Why did you turn out the lights?

DECIO. If she sees my room lighted, she will call and question me. What can I say to her? [*Pause*] No, we must neither of us see her now. Let us hope she will give it up. Wait! [*Tiptoes to the window*] There is still a light downstairs.

BIANCA. Giulio!

GIULIO. This is terrible! [*A longer pause.*]

DECIO. She will think you are out, and will go back to her room. Be quiet! Wait! [*Giulio sits down, overcome*] You will have to tell her tomorrow that you were out. That you went to find — Ippolito. Or we will tell

her we went out together for a short walk. That we went farther than we meant, and came in late. She is looking for you. She is restless, — disturbed.

GIULIO. Perhaps something has happened to her?

DECIO. No — She is just uneasy.

GIULIO. What shall I do? Go to her?

DECIO. What will you say to her? [*Pause.*]

BIANCA [*calls in a louder voice, but farther off*] Giulio!
Giulio!

GIULIO. You go down.

DECIO. And what shall *I* say to her? And my face ravaged with emotion. She will read it, as she would read yours.

GIULIO. But she keeps on. She is still calling.

DECIO [*listens*] No, — she has stopped. Perhaps she has gone back to her room. [*Pause*] Let us slip out now, very quietly, and come back talking in loud tones. Meantime, bathe your eyes. Quickly! [*Giulio rises, goes toward the dressing room. At this point a soft tap on the door is heard*] Your mother! [*Pushes Giulio into the dressing room*] Quiet! Who is it?

BIANCA [*outside, in a low, breathless voice*] It is I, Decio.

DECIO [*closing the dressing room door*] You, Donna Bianca?

BIANCA. Are you in bed?

DECIO [*after a moment's hesitation*] No. . . .

BIANCA. May I come in?

DECIO [*turns on the lights*] Why,—certainly. [*Opens the door. Enter Bianca, in a loose housegown*]

DECIO [*gaining self-possession*] What do you wish? Is anything the matter?

BIANCA. Giulio? Where is he?

DECIO. Isn't he in his room?

BIANCA. Didn't you hear me call him?

DECIO [*pointing to the dressing room*] I was in there. I couldn't hear.

BIANCA. I could not go to sleep without knowing that he was in bed, and at peace. I tiptoed to his room,—he was not there. I looked in the garden,—called. Nothing!

DECIO. He must have gone out.

BIANCA. No. Maurilio told me he had not gone out; that he was here with you. Where is he?

DECIO. My dear Bianca. . . .

BIANCA. He was here. You spoke with him? What did he say to you? [*Observing Decio closely*] Decio, your face,—your eyes. What has happened? Where is he? What are you hiding from me? Where is Giulio?

[*The dressing room door opens and Giulio appears.*]

BIANCA [*with a little cry*] Giulio! My Giulio! [*Looking at him*] You were crying! Why? What does it all mean? Decio, — tell me. [*She is afraid to understand. Then, questioningly*] No! Not that!

[*Decio lowers his eyes, but remains silent, overcome. Bianca utters a cry as if she were dying, and sinks into a chair, burying her face in her hands. Decio gestures his desperate grief. He and Giulio look at each other. Giulio does not hesitate; in an outburst of love and pity, he kneels, embraces and caresses his mother. In a voice of deep emotion but always restrained, he calls her, each time accenting it more.*]

GIULIO. Mother! Mother! Mother!! Here is Giulio. Your Giulio. I am speaking to you! Listen to me! Mother!!!

[*Decio closes the door and then the window. He remains apart, by the window.*]

GIULIO [*seeing that Bianca remains passive, as if she had fainted, turns to Decio*] Help me!

DECIO [*approaching, leans over Bianca*] My dear, Giulio knows it is not our fault, or that the fault was mine alone. But he has pardoned me. He loves you, — he worships you. Bianca — he is at your feet. He is calling to you.

GIULIO. Mother! My mother!

BIANCA [*raises herself a little. Her face is ashen, her*

eyes sunken, unseeing, as if they did not wish to see]
Giulio. . . .

GIULIO. Yes, mother, it is Giulio.

BIANCA [*not daring to look at him*] You know! He told you, — Decio! Oh, the selfishness of men, — even the best! How infamous!

GIULIO. No, mother, — Decio told me nothing. I swear it.

BIANCA [*looking at him fixedly*] Nothing? Then what do you know? Ah, my poor boy, what do you know? [*A new thought strikes her*] Is that why you wish to go away?

GIULIO [*rising but remaining close to his mother*] Yes. But not for always. I don't wish to leave you. But I was saying to — to Decio, before you came in, I need to pull myself together. I need to make another *I*. So I must go away from here. Far from home, — to breathe a different air. To see other people. To occupy my mind. To quiet my heart. You understand, mother, as, — as *he* does? You won't admit it. You can't, — because you love me. Mother, sit down. Look at me. Let us talk it over calmly. We can, now that the storm is over. We are just three good friends discussing a case, quite outside *our* lives. Mother, you ought to understand my need. You ought to admit it. Of course, it is a sacrifice, — a little

sacrifice that I ask you. You have made so many for me. Make this one, and let me go.

BIANCA [*timidly*] To travel? A wonderful voyage? [*Giulio shakes his head*] A long journey, with Decio? I can go with you.

GIULIO. No, — no, mother. Don't be blind. I am twenty. Don't you know what people would say, of a journey we three should take?

BIANCA. What people would say?

GIULIO. Why, yes. They would think. . . . Oh, mother, don't make me say it. . . . And what good would two months, six months, away, do me? I should come back with everything unchanged. No. I must make a life for myself. Do something to make me worth while to myself, and in the eyes of others. Perhaps I shall not succeed. But at least people will say, "He tried to do something for himself; he is not idling away his life, waiting for the wealth of both his fathers."

DECIO. That has been said?

GIULIO. No; because I would have killed whoever said it. But I have felt their smothered laughter and mockery. Everyone in our little world knows, and so I must live it down away from here.

DECIO. And I put this in your head.

GIULIO. You? A year ago my fine father, after a

drink or two of champagne, said at his club, "My son is the son of my best friend." The remark was overheard. It was not believed, but they told me, so as to see how I would take it. I understood perfectly. He had said this to brazen out the situation.

BIANCA [*in a thread of a voice*] Giulio!

GIULIO. Public opinion has never attacked either of you. [*To Decio*] You have done what any one would have done, and my mother is respected, because the world at heart is just, and understands that not even a saint married to that man could have acted otherwise.

DECIO [*trying to silence him*] Giulio!

GIULIO. I rebel, but what can I do. I can not go into the public streets and cry out, "Spare me your scorn, gentlemen. I know that I am not Signor Querceta's son, but what do you wish me to do? I cannot change my name."

DECIO. Enough, Giulio.

GIULIO. Oh, a journey! Yes, but a very far journey. Away from civilization. Away from the world that knows, that observes, comments. Lucesia! There is something to do there. There I can make a name for myself. A new one, — mine alone. There nobody knows. It is a land of savages, and savages are good people.

DECIO [*violently*] Be silent, Giulio! Are you mad? Look at your mother.

GIULIO. Yes, I am mad. Mad! Let me go! Let me go! [*He goes toward the door.*]

BIANCA. Don't go! Decio, stop him! Giulio, you are killing me.

[*Decio holds Giulio back.*]

BIANCA [*in a low voice, broken with emotion*] I feel as if I should die, here tonight, of grief,—of shame. But even so, that would not change things. I can not give you another name. All I can do is to free you. To let you go where you will. To do what you will. I hold you back no longer. Go—tomorrow, if you wish. I can free you even without dying. It is my punishment.

[*Decio is going towards her, but she gestures him back.*]

GIULIO [*murmurs*] Mother!

BIANCA. Yes, it is a just punishment. It had to come. It has come.

GIULIO. Mother, forgive me. I was crazy. I was mad.

BIANCA. No, my poor child, you were not mad. And it is you who must forgive me, now and always. Because there is no excuse for a woman,—there never is—who has done what I have done. The world is just, as you have said, and has spared me. Circumstances lighten a fault a little, but they do not destroy it. I won't tell you what excuse I had. I won't tell you about my marriage,

and the martyrdom that began a few months after it. I shall tell you nothing of all this. Why should I? Because I know that if I had been the unhappiest woman in the world, — the most ill-treated, — that would not have given me the right . . .

GIULIO [*imploringly*] Mother! Have pity on me.

BIANCA [*rises, holds herself very erect; with great dignity, but with great emotion in her voice*] Yes, Giulio, I give you *all* my pity. If I did not, my woman's dignity would be enough to keep me silent. It would not allow me to say all that I could say to excuse me in your eyes. But there is one thing I must tell you.

GIULIO. No, mother!

BIANCA. There are some things that I must and can tell you without giving you pain.

GIULIO. Not now! Not now!

BIANCA. When? If you go away, who knows if I shall see you again? I shall speak now, — then go to my room to pray. Listen. The day that I knew I was to be a mother, I realized my fault. An impulse, — absurd, perhaps, but irresistible, — an impulse of my conscience, — forced me to my husband. I said to him: "I am a mother." To say that was to give him the right to kill me, or to drive me out. To force me to bring into the world a poor little creature without a name. Because he had been

so long a stranger to me. But he did not kill me, and he did not send me away. I tell you this, not because you are judging him, but that you may judge me. What could I do? Go away? Rebel? I was so young, — so weak, so helpless. I had to consider my mother and my little sister, Mariolina's mother, — who would be the innocent victims of this scandal. But I thought most of all of my child. I could not bring him into the world nobody's son. And so I resigned myself.

GIULIO. My mother!

BIANCA. One thing more. You were six years old. It was evening. Decio had dined with us, and we were in the salon. My husband, he and I. There was one of the usual discussions between my husband and me. You came running in, at the very moment when Ippolito said, "Very well, since you are in such a bad humor, I am going to the club. I leave you Decio. Perhaps your best friend will be able to calm you." He went out, slamming the door. You can not remember, Giulio; you were too young. But a little frightened at your . . . your — father, you fixed your great eyes on me and then on Decio, without saying anything. I called you to me. You hardly returned my kiss, and left without speaking to Decio. I felt as if my heart were ice. Your eyes fixed first on me and then on Decio! You could not understand. My reason told me

that was absurd. But you felt. So from that night I saw clearly, and I said to Decio, that for your sake, that you might not understand, our love must die, — must be changed into a calm affection. Henceforth, he was for me only a friend. Between us there was only one love, — you, Giulio, — our child. And Decio understood, too, and accepted it. We had to respect your innocence, and allow nothing to stain it. That day, I ceased to be a woman, and became only a mother. To live for you, — only for you, seemed to be the one way I could redeem my fault. I was young, and I was passionately in love. I must say that. For that is my excuse. And yet my sacrifice, my jealous care, has been of no avail.

GIULIO. Mother!

BIANCA. I have finished, my dearest. There is nothing more to say to you. Except this, — that my mother knows and has forgiven me. [*She sinks exhausted into a chair*] And now, beloved, I shall let you go. It is right. What you have said is the truth. We were blind not to have seen it before you. You shall go away. I owe you even this. I owe everything to you. Life! I gave it to you, — I give it back to you again. You shall carry it away with you. Yet, how shall I live here alone without you? I shall be like one dead. But that does not matter. *You* must live. You must make a life for yourself. The one

that I have given you was so, so unhappy. You shall go away. No, I won't cry. Look, I am smiling, I am happy, because I am still able to do something for you, — out of my own crushed heart. It is so little, — so little, — but it is all that I can do, my dearest son, my one beloved.

[She leans over to kiss him, but her act is interrupted by the voice of Ippolito coming out of the garden. It startles all three.]

IPPOLITO *[under Decio's window, in a low voice]* Decio! Decio!

[Decio hesitates a moment, then with a rapid glance at Bianca and Giulio, goes to the window and opens it.]

DECIO. Do you wish me?

IPPOLITO. Are you still up? Do you know it is almost midnight? You are ruining me, using up all this electric light.

DECIO. I am not sleepy, so I have been writing some letters.

IPPOLITO. Bianca and Giulio have gone to bed?

DECIO. I think so. We said good-night a while ago.

IPPOLITO. Well, everything is quiet. *[Whistles an air from "Friend Fritz"]* There is nothing left but to go to bed.

DECIO. I am going, too. Good-night.

IPPOLITO. Good-night.

[The sound of a door closing is heard.]

BIANCA [*coming close to Giulio*] Be at peace, my son. You shall go away.

GIULIO. Tomorrow we will speak of this again, and decide. We can not endure any more now. We are exhausted. Go and rest, mother. You can not bear any more. Let us go.

BIANCA. Yes.

[*Giulio goes to the window to see whether Ippolito has surely gone.*]

BIANCA. What are you doing? Don't show yourself.

[*Decio goes to window, then cautiously opens door and looks out.*]

DECIO. Nobody. The lights are all out.

GIULIO. Come, mother.

[*Bianca goes to door, then hesitates.*]

BIANCA [*in a thread of a voice*] I am afraid.

GIULIO. Of what? Of whom? I am with you. [*Puts his arm about his mother. Decio opens the door. Giulio and Bianca go out slowly. Bianca does not speak nor look at Decio; but Giulio, as he passes his father, touches him lovingly on the arm. When Bianca and Giulio have gone, Decio closes the door and leans against it, spent. A brief pause.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE.

ACT THREE.

SCENE: *Same as Act I. A few days later. Morning of a beautiful September day. The room streams with sunshine. The piano is closed. Vases are filled with fresh flowers.*

Mariolina enters from the garden, with an armful of flowers. She is dressed in white and carries a wide straw hat. She comes in half running. When she does not see anybody, she stops. Looking about and seeing no one, she pauses undecided.

Enter Christina, left.

MARIOLINA. Ah, Christina.

CHRISTINA. Good-morning, signorina.

MARIOLINA. My aunt?

CHRISTINA. She is up now.

MARIOLINA. What kind of a night did she have?

CHRISTINA. She could not have slept much. All her candles were burned out.

MARIOLINA. I will go to her. I suppose I may see her?

CHRISTINA. Certainly.

[*Mariolina goes out the door, left, having placed her flowers on the piano. Christina crosses the room and goes out through the other door. Don Ludovico is ushered in by Maurilio. Don Ludovico is in traveling dress and carries a little old valise.*]

DON LUDOVICO. I am too early, but it does not matter.

MAURILIO. Signor Ippolito is now out, but he will be here in time to say good-by. Signor Giulio has gone to say farewell to the old Marchesa. Signor Decio is still in his room.

DON LUDOVICO. Very well. I will wait.

MAURILIO. Donna Bianca told me to tell her as soon as Don Ludovico came. [*Christina enters from the door at the back*] Christina, will you tell the Signora that Don Ludovico is here. [*Christina curtsies to Don Ludovico and goes out left*] Won't you put down your valise?

DON LUDOVICO. Thank you. I have to keep it under my eyes, or I would forget it. I am so little accustomed to travel. [*Sits down*] And so, Maurilio, Signor Giulio's last day has come. The house seems empty already.

MAURILIO. It will not be gay. Don Ludovico, I still can not understand what has happened. In two days the house has utterly changed. And my poor lady!

DON LUDOVICO. Ah, but youth will have its way. It gets an idea into its head and will not be denied.

MAURILIO. But Signor Giulio has great courage to go so far, and to leave his mother alone.

DON LUDOVICO. Alone?

MAURILIO [*in a low voice, and as a privileged old servant*] Signor Decio leaves, too.

DON LUDOVICO. I know.

MAURILIO. And who knows if we will ever see them again.

DON LUDOVICO. What are you saying, Maurilio! Why, the signorino is just a sort of modern Columbus, setting out to discover a new world. In our time explorers always return. But it grieves you very much, doesn't it?

MAURILIO. I am sorry for Donna Bianca. She looks to me as if she were dying, God save her! And then I shall miss Signor Giulio. I was here before he was born.

DON LUDOVICO. I understand. I am very fond of this family, too, though I have known them only a few years. Splendid people! Splendid people!

[*Mariolina comes in from the left.*]

MARIOLINA. Good-morning, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. Good-morning, Mariolina.

[*Maurilio goes out the door at the back.*]

MARIOLINA. My aunt begs me to excuse her. She has not finished dressing. She will be down as soon as possible.

DON LUDOVICO. And how is your aunt?

MARIOLINA. You can imagine. She is bearing up by sheer will power.

DON LUDOVICO. I understand.

MARIOLINA. If you will permit me, I will stay with you, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. Delighted, — mademoiselle.

[*Mariolina sits on the divan.*]

MARIOLINA. Thank you.

DON LUDOVICO [*looking at her closely*] You seem down-cast, Mariolina.

MARIOLINA. You don't expect me to be gay, — with this general flight? Why, it seems to me a dream. Only the night before last here we were. And you, too. We were not talking of anything special, were we? And in twenty-four hours, this voyage is decided upon. I have never seen anything like it. Giulio goes! Decio goes!

DON LUDOVICO. And I go, too.

MARIOLINA. But you will come back tonight.

DON LUDOVICO. No, — tomorrow.

MARIOLINA [*pointing to the valise*] Is that your luggage?

DON LUDOVICO [*lifting it up*] Rather antique. It was my grandfather's. I hope it won't disgrace your uncle's fine automobile. What do you think of it?

MARIOLINA. Oh, it is perfectly beautiful.

DON LUDOVICO. Do you know, this is the first automobile trip I have ever taken?

MARIOLINA. Do you call from here to Milan a trip?

DON LUDOVICO. For me, it is a voyage. I have never been in an automobile but once, and then I drove only around the square.

MARIOLINA. Were you afraid? Giulio speeded, didn't he?

DON LUDOVICO. I am not afraid of anything. I would go in an airplane if the Bishop would let me.

[*Mariolina remains with lowered eyes and says nothing.*]

DON LUDOVICO [*approaching her, lays his hand caressingly on her head*] Now, — now, — now! You must be gay.

[*Mariolina bursts into sobs.*]

DON LUDOVICO. Why, Mariolina, there is no reason to cry.

MARIOLINA [*broken with sobs*] Yes, I suppose I ought to laugh. What shall I do here without Giulio, — without Decio?

DON LUDOVICO. You have your grandmother.

[*Mariolina shrugs her shoulders.*]

MARIOLINA. Grandmother is old. She lives between her bed and the armchair. That is not exactly hilarious.

DON LUDOVICO. Then you have your aunt and your uncle.

MARIOLINA. It is bad enough to see my aunt now. I don't know what she will be like when Giulio is gone. [*Looking fixedly at Don Ludovico*] But I understand now.

DON LUDOVICO [*a little startled*] What?

MARIOLINA. Do you remember what aunt said about staying here always? She knew that Giulio would go away.

DON LUDOVICO. I shall be glad to have her here.

MARIOLINA. You are very selfish.

DON LUDOVICO. Perhaps I am, but you should not say it to your pastor.

MARIOLINA. Well, I don't think God ought to let some things happen.

DON LUDOVICO. His will is inscrutable.

MARIOLINA. That has nothing to do with aunt's letting Giulio go. I don't see why she does. Lucesia! The world is big enough already. We don't need to discover any more of it.

DON LUDOVICO. Instead of grumbling, you ought to be glad that Giulio is doing a fine and noble thing. Above all, you should be cheerful about it. Your Aunt Bianca needs a loving and gay companion.

MARIOLINA. Here is Decio. You can preach to him now. [*She goes over to the piano. Enter Decio, through the door at the back.*]

DECIO [*almost gayly*] Good-morning, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. Good-morning, Signor Piccardi.

DECIO. All ready for the journey?

DON LUDOVICO. Yes. My baggage is here. [*He points out Mariolina.*]

DECIO [*turning round*] Oh, Mariolina. Good-morning.
[*Mariolina turns her back and does not answer.*]

DECIO [*going up to her*] Are you angry?

MARIOLINA. Yes.

DECIO. With me?

MARIOLINA. Yes.

DECIO. Why, I have just come in. What have I done?

MARIOLINA. It is all your fault.

DECIO. My fault?

MARIOLINA. Yes. Because if you were not going with Giulio, he would have to stay at home. What will *you* do there in Lucesia? Lucesia can't get on without you, I suppose. And you will catch cold, at your age.

DECIO. Thank you.

MARIOLINA. You deserve much worse than a cold. I should like to know why you are going, too.

DECIO. You can. When your Aunt Bianca felt it was right that Giulio should realize his dream, she asked me to go with him. She felt I would curb his daring, and recall her, waiting for him at home. I accepted with great pleasure, because I like adventure. And though I am old, I do

not catch cold. Most of all, I am going because it will reassure his mother. And you, mademoiselle, who love your aunt, ought not to be angry with me. Besides, it is all your own fault. Yes, it is. A day or two ago, I offered you my hand, and you refused it. So now, desperate, I flee to darkest Africa to forget.

MARIOLINA. How can you joke about it? What kind of heart have you? If you saw my aunt, you would not think it a laughing matter. [*She goes off, left.*]

DON LUDOVICO [*after a moment, in a low voice and in a confidential tone*] Yesterday morning early Donna Bianca sent for me.

DECIO. Yes.

DON LUDOVICO. She told me all, and asked my advice.

DECIO [*hesitatingly*] You did not know?

DON LUDOVICO. No. I have only been in this parish a few years, and I am Donna Bianca's friend, not her confessor. She did not confess now. People of intelligence and heart and conscience can confide very simply in a friend who is a priest. There are some good people among priests, you know. And four eyes see better than two. [*A short pause*] But I do not wish to make myself out more stupid than I am. I understood that there was a mystery in Donna Bianca's life, and divined what it was. I had heard what they said in your world, of Giulio, but I know that human

malice is great, and so I never dwelt upon the subject. Donna Bianca appeared to me a saintly creature, — a creature of faith, who did much good. A little unhappy, but an exemplary mother. That was enough to make me her friend, and to let me remember her in my prayers.

DECIO [*almost humbly*] Is it still enough?

DON LUDOVICO [*simply*] Yes.

DECIO. And your advice, Don Ludovico?

DON LUDOVICO. Donna Bianca did not need it. She called me through a natural need of unburdening herself in a moment of anguish. And, then, in what would she trust if not in the affection and esteem of her pastor? Her decision was already taken. She wished to know whether I approved.

DECIO. Do you?

DON LUDOVICO. Yes. She must and she should sacrifice herself in order to give peace to a young and troubled heart.

DECIO. Do you think the sacrifice of this poor woman will be of any use?

DON LUDOVICO. I hope so. Certainly we are face to face with an unusual case of conscience. There are many children situated as Giulio is, and many of them also know and are not at all troubled by it. For them the father is the man whose name they bear. They do not rebel against

it. If all, or the greater part, felt and acted like Giulio, we would have to consider whether the great reform timidly advocated by some solitary thinker, should not be put into practice. That is, all children belong to the mother. To the mother only, and bear her name.

DECIO. You mean the abolition of marriage?

DON LUDOVICO. Rather a transformation. But these are not the thoughts of a poor country priest. Let us come back to our own case. I confess that I can not find it in me to condemn Giulio. Instinctively, all my sympathy is for him. How exquisitely sensitive the boy is! Donna Bianca told me about his attitude toward her. What a generous heart he has!

[Decio's eyes have brightened and he drinks in these words with the pride of a father. In an impulse of profound gratitude he offers Don Ludovico his hand. Don Ludovico withdraws his hand without appearing to reject Decio's. Decio is profoundly moved.]

DECIO. I think we made a mistake. We should have denied it.

DON LUDOVICO. There are truths that we must not even attempt to deny. But, upon you, Signor Decio, devolves a hard and delicate task.

DECIO. Yes.

DON LUDOVICO. I advised Donna Bianca to have you go with Giulio.

DECIO. I am perfectly willing, except for the thought of leaving her alone.

DON LUDOVICO. It will be a comfort to her. I saw her poor eyes brighten at the thought. Your going with Giulio is a sort of security. It gives her strength to wait for him. But when you are far off, Signor Decio, you must complete your good work. You must induce Giulio to come back after a time, and to come back resigned and calm. To make him understand that resignation and silence are imposed upon him as the most sacred of duties, so long as his mother lives. Cure him. Convince him that it is not dishonorable for him to keep silence. The only dishonor would be to reveal this secret, or even to show that he knows it. To do so would be the most inhuman sort of vileness and the most horrible of vanities, — because that boy is the victim of an unusual and exquisite case of conscience. At the same time an indistinct and vague impulse of pride rules and guides his feelings and his acts. He is afraid to appear in the eyes of the world, either an idiot who does not know, or, worse, a cynic who does not wish to know. So he is tempted to cry out his secret to all the world. It is necessary to cure him of this, — that he may return the proud standard bearer of a new law. A law that perhaps will never be written,

but has no need to be written in order to be holy and human. Every man is the son of the woman who bore him in her suffering. The mother alone is sacred, and no child has the right to judge her, to absolve her, or to punish her. The child has but one duty, — to help, defend, protect his mother. And when you are far away, then you must say to this son, every hour, every minute, "Your post is there, with her. Neither Ippolito nor I really counts. We do not exist. We have no right over you nor over your heart. That is hers and hers alone. She has bought it at a bitter, bitter price." [*A brief silence*] I don't know whether what I have just said is exactly orthodox for a Catholic priest. But it does not matter.

DECIO. I will tell him what you have said.

DON LUDOVICO. Not now! It would not be any use. He is in the acute stage of his crisis. You would irritate instead of convincing him. He must go away. It is necessary to let him conquer. In time his kindness and his affection will win. There in Lucesia he will be homesick, with the sweetest and strongest of all longings, — the longing for his mother. And then these things spoken by you. . . . [*A silence. He changes his tone*] You did not find it difficult to join this expedition?

DECIO. Not at all. Galvani Scotti receives all well disposed people who offer themselves, and who are not fright-

ened by the hardships of the enterprise. A telegram written yesterday was enough to get a place for Giulio and another, half as a tourist, for me, since I will pay all my own expenses and will contribute to the general fund.

DON LUDOVICO. And your preparations?

DECIO. We have a day in Milan and two in Naples before embarking.

DON LUDOVICO [*after a slight hesitation*] And — here? No opposition? No — surprise?

DECIO. You mean Ippolito? None.

DON LUDOVICO. I must say that man is a queer riddle.

DECIO. Don Ludovico, if you lived in our world for one week, you would find many like him.

DON LUDOVICO. And never one word to his wife? Nor to you? Neither then nor since?

DECIO. No,—never. I have wondered about it for twenty years. He did not acquiesce through fear. He is not a hero. Yet he is no coward. Not for self-interest, because he is quite as rich as his wife. He was glad to have an heir,—otherwise he would have lost an inheritance from his uncle. But he was too rich to care much about that. Perhaps he has been silent through fear of scandal and love of peace. He likes a gay life, and he is a sensualist. He married Donna Bianca when she was scarcely more than a child,—through a caprice. He tired of her in six months.

He loves all women. That which happened gave him absolute liberty, without question, without trouble. It gave him full rights to do as he pleased, without causing any annoying change in his existence. With his mentality, which is not very great; with his conscience, quite sufficiently elastic, he accepted a pact,—not expressed, naturally, because he would not have stood that. Yet he did accept it, tacitly, as on our side we accepted it, with pain, almost with disgust. But neither the law nor the church permitted us anything better.

DON LUDOVICO [*after a moment's reflection*] Life is complicated, isn't it?

DECIO. A closed door, Don Ludovico! A closed door!

DON LUDOVICO. It is strange! If all three of you, Donna Bianca, Ippolito and you, had confessed to me, one after another, the one I would have absolved with the greatest reluctance would be—Ippolito. But don't tell that to anybody.

[*The door at the left opens. Bianca and Mariolina appear.*]

BIANCA. Have I kept you waiting, Don Ludovico?

DON LUDOVICO [*shaking hands*] No, indeed. How do you feel, Donna Bianca?

MARIOLINA. How do you suppose she feels? Poor aunt!

DON LUDOVICO [*trying to be gay*] You are becoming very headstrong, Mariolina.

BIANCA. Poor Mariolina, too. Good-morning, Decio.

[*Decio kisses her hand. Mariolina goes and gets the flowers she placed on the piano.*]

MARIOLINA. I brought you the flowers that you like, Aunt Bianca. Shall I put them in your room?

BIANCA. A few here and a few there, Mariolina.

MARIOLINA. Yes, aunt. [*She begins to arrange the flowers in the vases.*]

BIANCA. Giulio?

MARIOLINA. I met him going in to say good-by to grandmother. He will be here in a moment.

BIANCA. And everything is quite ready?

DECIO. Yes, Donna Bianca. We have been up since dawn.

BIANCA. Your things, too?

DECIO. I shall buy what I need in Milan.

MARIOLINA. They say Giulio's luggage is fascinating. I am going to look at it. May I?

BIANCA. Yes. That is splendid.

MARIOLINA. I will arrange the flowers afterwards. [*She goes out through the door at the back.*]

BIANCA. Don Ludovico, let me make one more request.

DON LUDOVICO. Yes, Donna Bianca.

BIANCA. When you see your young friend in Milan, — tell him I confide in him. The others do not need his help so much as I who stay. So tell your young friend about me, — about this poor mother. Ask him to write to me. To telegraph, if he can. [*Taking out a purse*] Look, here is some money. Give it to him, for his charities, and also for any expense on my account.

DON LUDOVICO. No, Donna Bianca. He does not need it.

BIANCA. I insist. It takes so much money to send a letter or telegram; — couriers cost so much. Please take it.

DON LUDOVICO [*taking the money*] If it will make you any happier.

BIANCA. Thank you.

[*Mariolina appears in the doorway.*]

MARIOLINA. Don Ludovico, there is an old man wishes to see you. He won't come in. It is a message to his son in Milan.

DON LUDOVICO. Thank you, Mariolina. I will see him now. Will you excuse me, Donna Bianca? [*She bows. Don Ludovico and Mariolina depart.*]

DECIO. You place all your trust in a stranger, — in this young priest. Have you no faith — in me?

BIANCA. I don't know. You are going and I must stay, — alone, — alone.

DECIO. Bianca, let me stay with you.

BIANCA. No.

DECIO. Look at me. . . . You are dying of grief. I will not go.

BIANCA. Decio!

DECIO. No! My love has never changed. You bade me stifle it. I have obeyed. But it is still there, to shield, to defend, to adore.

BIANCA. Stop!

DECIO. No. Hear me out. I will not go. Let Giulio have his way. He is safe without me. But you . . . We still are young, beloved. Let me take you away. Giulio will make his own life. Let us have ours at last, together. We, too, will go far away. Fulfill the old dream. Love that has lasted through all these years will last until the end. It has its rights. Come, and let me give you love, — let me give you peace. Let me be near to comfort, — to help you bear this parting.

BIANCA. No. Giulio parts us now as he has always parted us. We gave him life, — a terrible gift. We owe him everything. You, too, must put him before me. If we go away together, Decio, when Giulio comes home, — what? Never speak of this again. You must go, and I must stay, — alone.

DECIO. Bianca . . . !

BIANCA. Decio, — Decio! No, — no, — no!

[*Giulio is heard whistling merrily as he comes through the garden.*]

DECIO. Giulio . . .

BIANCA. Promise — always — and only — Giulio.

DECIO [*hesitates, — brokenly*] Yes.

[*Bianca walks to the bay window, trying to gain some self-control to meet her son. Giulio enters. He does not see his mother. He bursts in headlong, excited and happy. He is in traveling costume.*]

GIULIO. Here I am at last. Decio, is everything ready? I have telegraphed. Galvani Scotti expects us to be at the "Cavour" at noon.

BIANCA. Giulio!

GIULIO. Oh, mother, are you here? [*Goes toward her. Decio goes into the garden.*]

BIANCA [*coming down stage to meet Giulio*] Did you see grandmother?

GIULIO. Yes. I just left her.

BIANCA. What did she say to you?

GIULIO. Oh, a few tears. She expects you at dinner. She will send the machine at seven. Now, I must go out and lock the bags.

BIANCA. Wait a moment. [*Smiling at him a little*] Are you in a hurry?

GIULIO. No. It is ten o'clock. We must be in Milan at noon.

BIANCA [*imploringly*] Just one moment more, Giulio.

GIULIO. Two hours is not much to drive to Milan. [*Jokingly*] And I can't drive too fast, because it would frighten Don Ludovico.

BIANCA. Giulio, are you really going?

GIULIO. Mother!

BIANCA. Yes, — of course you are. Only it is so far away. I can not follow you even in imagination. Because it is a place I do not know. I can see you in Milan, — in Naples, — on the ship. And then, — nothing more. Only a dark cloud that shuts you from me, — shuts you into the unknown.

GIULIO. Mother!

BIANCA. And I shall be here on the other side of the darkness.

GIULIO. Mother, — be good!

BIANCA. Yes, Giulio.

GIULIO. You know that it takes a great deal of courage for me to go. It has torn me in pieces. For two days and two nights I have done nothing except think, — "Shall I go? Shall I stay?" And it seemed to me that I ought to go. Tell me what to do, mother. There is still time

to change. Mother, my dearest mother! Shall I stay? Answer! Shall I stay?

BIANCA. No! Go! It is best for you. Oh, Giulio, it is not because you are going that my heart is broken. It is because I am the cause of your going.

GIULIO. Mother!

BIANCA. Ah, yes! Even if you stay, the reason of your going would still exist. It was born with you, and it will not die until your death. Even my death would not destroy it. Oh, if my death would only free you!

GIULIO. Mother! Mother!

BIANCA. Tell me that you forgive me.

GIULIO. Mother, are you mad? What are you saying?

BIANCA. Tell me that you forgive me. Tell me that you love me still, — even if it is not true.

GIULIO. If it is not true! [*Puts his arms around her neck*] Why, you are my mother. My mother that I love. And you are my saint. I bless you, and I adore you. [*Bends and kisses her hands.*]

BIANCA. My son!

GIULIO. Yes, you are my mother. Do you understand what that means? In my heart there is no one except you, and all my love is for you, for you alone. For me there is no one in all the world except you.

BIANCA. After all that has happened, Giulio?

GIULIO. Yes. Now and forever. And when I shall be far away, and you are here alone, just close your eyes and you will see me, and hear my words. They come from my heart, and my heart will always say them, wherever I may be, every hour, every minute.

BIANCA. My blessed.

GIULIO. Yes, through you, — by you. And I bless the day that I was born, — if my birth gave you one joy, and I bless the love through which I was born, if it gave you any joy. Nothing else counts. Nothing else exists. Nothing else has ever been. I am going away now because I have had a little crisis, and I must get over it. Just as if I had had an illness, and I had to spend a few months in a sanitarium. That you know and understand. But in our life, this is only a little pause. Think! They are going to found a city out there, and when everything is in order, it will be a beautiful country with a fine climate, and I shall come back for you. You will go out there with me. Only a dream? Well, let us dream a little, for dreams are good. And when we go out there together, we will take Mariolina, too. Tell me the truth. You planned to give her to me in a few years as my wife? Well, who knows? Now, I must not say anything, — but in a few years . . . Laugh, mother. Smile, at least. I want to see you smile. Smile at this lovely dream. We shall live

out there, — all of us who love each other, — all of those who respect each other. Out there, — alone. Mother!

BIANCA. Go, now, Giulio. You have made me almost too happy. Go. It is getting late.

GIULIO. Yes. It is late. [*He bends over to kiss her*] My dear mother! My beautiful mother! All mine! All mine! [*Very much moved, he goes toward the door. Don Ludovico and Decio come in. Giulio smiles at them and quickly goes out. Don Ludovico goes to Bianca.*]

DON LUDOVICO. Courage, Donna Bianca. Time will bring calm. The peace of duty accepted and fulfilled.

BIANCA. Ah, perhaps. But I do not feel it a duty. For me it is an expiation.

IPPOLITO [*from the door at the back*] Good-morning, explorer. The automobile is ready. If you wish to be in Milan by noon, it is time to see about your luggage.

DECIO. Giulio went to lock the trunks.

IPPOLITO. Very well. [*Lights a cigarette. Pause*] Decio, one thing rather serious I must say to you.

DECIO. Yes.

IPPOLITO. First of all — there is no use in going into the subject, — but I understand, and am grateful for what you are doing. Your going with Giulio will give peace of mind to my wife. I, too, will be better satisfied.

DECIO. Please . . .

IPPOLITO. I am not concerned about what the gossips will say of your sudden departure with Giulio. I have always made it a rule not to care about other people's comments. I know that the affair is a good thing for Bianca, and that is enough. But let us speak about the business end of this. . . .

DECIO. Business end?

IPPOLITO. Yes. Always when Giulio came home from his travels with you, I asked you for his expense account. You always refused, saying you were happy to make your young friend a little present. Giulio was a boy. That was all right then. But now he is grown. It is different. Bianca and I will send letters of credit to Naples for him. Separate accounts make good friends. You understand?

DECIO. Yes.

[*Enter Giulio and Mariolina.*]

GIULIO [*to Ippolito*] Good-by.

IPPOLITO. I will go to the automobile with you. Is everything ready?

GIULIO. Yes.

IPPOLITO. I am content to have you go. You are restless and need a change. But remember, your mother is home here, anxious and troubled. So miss no chance of sending her news of you. [*He goes out. Giulio goes to join his mother.*]

MARIOLINA. Don Ludovico, shall I take your bag?

DON LUDOVICO [*in a low voice, giving her his valise*]

Don't you cry. [*They go out.*]

GIULIO. I shall not stay too long, mother.

BIANCA. Write at once. . . . Telegraph. . . .

GIULIO. Good-by . . . Mother . . . Mother . . .
Mother . . .

BIANCA. Go, beloved.

GIULIO. Mother!

[*Decio comes forward and kisses Bianca's hands. All three stand locked together for a moment. Decio goes.*]

BIANCA. Go, my heart. . . . Go . . . Go . . . quickly
. . . my soul!

[*Giulio goes out. The sound of good-bys, — the honk of an auto horn.*]

BIANCA [*wildly, as if the words are torn from her heart*]
Decio! Giulio! Giulio! My son!

CURTAIN.

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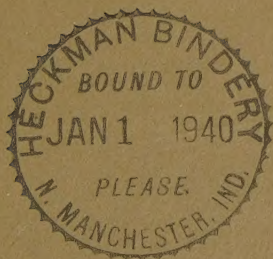
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